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# "THE CRACKER"

A ONE-ACT MELODRAMA

*by*

HORATIO S. JONES



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# THE CRACKER

A ONE-ACT MELODRAMA

Country home of a physician during the Civil War in western Missouri, near the Kansas line. A kitchen and bedroom are the only rooms shown. The bedroom is in left upper, seen through a practical door. Visible through this door are to be seen the upper part of bed and an old-fashioned bureau, etc. In the kitchen, right center, is a practical door leading outside. Left center, a practical window. In right lower an old-fashioned cook stove. Right upper, old fireplace, the chimney of which is so constructed that at the proper time it can be thrown down. This is done when a shell is supposed to strike it during a battle between Quantrel's men and Union troops. In center of kitchen is a table. Chairs about the room. Between kitchen door and window is a shelf on which is placed a small Bible. Lower left, in wall, is a secret door concealing a cabinet in which is a loaded shotgun (loaded only with powder). In kitchen floor there is a door leading down into cellar.

Place—Western Missouri near Kansas line. Time—Summer. Time of Day—About one-half hour before sunset. The light shining through kitchen window is in the beginning ruddy, gradually fading, and it becomes sufficiently dark before action of play is finished, that candles have to be lighted.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS.

MOLLIE PADGET.....A "cracker" from the mountains of Georgia, who speaks always in a dead level tone of voice.

Dr. Compton.....A physician.

Mrs. Compton .....The doctor's wife.

Captain Welborne.....U. S. A.

Joe Chedister.....Confederate spy.

Cynthia .....Colored servant—about 14 years old.

Two Soldiers .....U. S. A.

Scene I. Kitchen in home of Dr. Compton. Bedroom seen through open door, left upper.

Mrs. Mollie Padget.....(Discovered working about kitchen talking to Cynthia) "Cynthy, go on to that spring and git a bucket of fresh water. I told you hafer 'nour 'go an you ain't gone yit."

Cynthia ..... "Yessum, Miss Padget, I'm goin' torrectly (Bus. playing with a rag doll which has two painted faces, one crying, the other laughing.)

Mrs. Padget:.....Yes—you're goin', you're slower than sorghum merlasses in cold weather. Niggers ain't fitten for nuthin nohow. I work harder en any slave. Don't no sooner git one meal dun then it's time to git anuther. Go on now an' git thet water."

Cynthia: "Yessum, I hears you (throws doll down. Goes to window, leans out, then turns to Mrs. Padget.) Whut you all reckons 'matter wid them horses 'way ovah yonder in the back pasture? They act like they's sceered of sumthin'."

Mrs. Padget: Go on, now, an' git thet water; I can't funter 'roun here all day wastin' time on skeered horses."

Cynthia: (Still looking out of window and turning to talk to Mrs. P.) "Huh! Looks mighty funny. I dun see heaps of dus risin' way down the road. 'Spect it's sum more of them long horn ole cattle. I shore is 'fraid uv them. Wish Mr. Barnes would quit bringing them 'long here."

Mrs. Padget: "Ain't you never goin' after that water?"

Cynthia: "Shore I is. But whut I'm goin' to do if one uv them ole long horns gits after me? I'm 'fraid, Miss Padget, I shore is."

Mrs. Padget: (Turns to Cynthia, hands on hips, angry) "Ain't you goin'?"

Cynthia: (Leaves window, stands facing Mrs. P.) "'Scuse me, Miss Padget, ye shore got water on de brain. But I heard the doctor tellin' Mrs. Compton sumthin' 'bout you worsser then that. He dun said if you didn't quit thinkin' so much 'bout water you wuz goin' to get *Amphibolous*. He said dat, he shore did. I ain't trying to skeer you, but he said dat."

Mrs. Padget: "I guess I'll git it, whatever it is. But if you don't go on to that spring you'll think you got somethin' worsser than that."

(*Voice off stage*) Cynthia, come here.

Cynthia: (Laughing) "I'm goin' afteh dat water in jus' a minit, Miss Padget." (Exits laughing. Mrs. P. looks her disgust.)

Mrs. Padget: "That little imp works harder tryin' to keep out uv work than anybody I ever see. Well,

well, she has plenty uv company an' they ain't all black, either. *Work like a nigger* (disgusted). Huh, some folks think that's workin' mighty hard (sneeringly). I work hard 'cause I hafter to keep from goin' plumb crazy. When I git to thinkin' uv whut alls happened to me an mine, I git almost distracted. O, if I ever meet agin that Joe Chedister, I'll thank God Almighty for that. (Bus.) Ain't nuthin' so bad as war; ain't nuthin' it don't tear up, bust up and reternally ruin. It's been a hell to me. (Looks at bucket on stand.) Now, there's that bucket—empty."

(Enter Mrs. Compton.)

Mrs. Compton: "I thought you were talking to someone, Cousin Mollie."

Mrs. Padget: Wuz—talking to myself."

Mrs. Compton: (Laughing) "I see. Why do you insist on doing this work? It is too much for you—and when you came here you know I told you you did not have to work."

Mrs. Padget: "I don't do much, but to set 'round and do nuthin', I would go crazy. When I work, I dont' think so much 'bout my troubles. I ain't got no close kin no more, but you all—all killed endurin the war. (Looks steadily at floor but shows no emotion.) My man was called to jine in the war. He was home oncet an a devil by the name of Joe Chedister reported him a deserter an' before he could clar hisself he wuz tuck out by a gang of copper heads an' shot. These copper heads, I guess, wuz named after a snake, the one that strikes without warnin' 'cause he's too cowardly to give warnin'. These copper heads wuz too cowardly an' onery to jine the army, but staid to home claimin' to be sick an' other lies, an' tuck on theirselves to run the neighborhood. If ever I meet up with that man I'm goin' to kill him as sure as a gun is dangerous."

Mrs. Compton: "O, Cousin Mollie, you wouldn't. You must never think of such a thing."

Mrs. Padget: "You all don't know whut 'tis to suffer whut I have suffered. But the Good Book says, "An eye for an eye an' a tooth for a tooth," an' the man that took my husband's life must pay for it with his own."



Mrs. Compton: "That is from the Old Testament, Cousin Mollie. With the new dispensation of Jesus Christ this was displaced with the teaching "That if thy enemy smite thee on one cheek turn to him also the other." Humility is the prime article."

Mrs. Padget: Don't know nuthin' 'bout dispensation, but I have the place whut I speak of marked, an' it is in the Bible. (Goes to shelf and gets Bible, opens it and shows to Mrs. C.) An' I'm goin' to keep my faith in the Book. (Clasps hands over breast with book against breast.) An' when the time comes ain't nuthin' goin' to hold me back. I dreamed las' night that the coward come here and struck me an taunted me with havin' my husband killed. Ain't no use to worry 'bout it now, whut is to be will be, an' ain't nuthin' this side of Hades goin' to stop it."

Mrs. Compton: (Puts arm around Mrs. Padget—comforts her) "As it only makes you unhappy, we will not speak of it again. You are here, and Chedister, doubtless, is in the mountains of Georgia, and you will, perhaps, never see him again."

Mrs. Padget: "I tell you I'm going to meet him again. if the whole world wuz between him an' me, we will meet some day. (Bus.) Well, I must get to work. I want to have supper 'gin the doctor gets home. I know he will be hungry an tired after riding all day to see sick folks. He rides when no other doctor will. He ain't skeered of nuthin'. Strange what good men some can be an' whut onery cusses some others kin be. You go on out o' here. I can do more work alone. (Bus. Exit Mrs. C.)

Mrs. Padget goes about her work grumbling. Distant shooting is heard which rapidly becomes more and more violent. Every second or two a cannon shot booms out. The kitchen door is suddenly thrown open and a man, ragged, dirty, with several weeks' growth of beard on his face, showing fear and excitement, rushes into the kitchen. Mrs. Padget calmly surveys him.

Mrs. Padget: Well, are you lookin' for them soldiers? I hear 'em fightin' out there. (Points.)

Joe Chedister: "God, no. Hide me, quick. For the love of heaven, don't let them know I am here.

I am an innocent man, but if those soldiers ever get me they will murder me in cold blood."

Mrs. Padget: "O, I thought they wuz friends o' yours."

Joe Credister: "Please, please hide me. (Rings his hands; shows abject cowardice. She contemptuously goes to a door in floor of kitchen, raises it and points to steps. He vanishes down the steps. She lets down the door, stands perplexed, and as if trying to recall something.)

(Enter Mrs. Compton, followed by Cynthia. Mrs. Compton runs to window, turns excitedly to Mrs. Padget.)

Mrs. Compton: "O, Cousin Mollie, come here. Look! What do you think it means?"

Mrs. Padget: (Crosses to window, looks out intently.) "I guess it's Quantrel's bushwhackers and Union Troops fightin'. I heard 'em when they commenced."

Cynthia: (Has been much excited, running about, looking out the window and looking anxiously in the faces of the two women. She takes another look out the window.) "I dun tole you I seen dus' rising down the road." (Excitedly.)

Mrs. Padget: "Yes, an' you said it was long horns, too."

Cynthia: "Yessum. Well, I ain't got no time to argufy 'bout it. Dem soldiers is a goin' to be here in a minit, an' Ise goin' to be summers else." (She runs out kitchen door, slamming it behind her.)

Mrs. Compton: "O, what shall we do?"

Mrs. Padget: "I don't reckon we can do anything. (Turns away, wearily.) I got to go about my work. I thought when I got out of Georgia I would git out of the war, but it don't seem any better here. (Goes about her work with no excitement or apparent concern. The cannon still booms out every few seconds but she pays absolutely no attention. A shell strikes the corner of the chimney, knocking down brick, mortar and woodwork. Mrs. Compton screams and hides her face. Mrs. Padget is not excited, but as she takes in the dirt and rubbish becomes angry.) "Now who in the devil did that? Now I got to

clean up this dirt. I know I work harder then any slave." (The firing becomes less and less severe. Mrs. Compton goes to the window again and quickly turns away with a frightened face.)

Mrs. Compton: "O, Cousin Mollie! Come, look! Soldiers! They are coming to the house." (She rushes into bedroom and is seen kneeling at bedside in prayer. Mrs. Padget makes no reply; shows no concern. Goes on about her work. The door of kitchen is thrown open, and in walks an officer and two men.)

Mrs. Padget: (Looks at soldiers calmly.) "Now, who are you, and whut do you want?"

Officer: "You can see who we are. We are looking for ammunition." (Officer orders soldiers to search for ammunition.)

Mrs. Padget: (Looks on with expression of disgust.) "How did you know we had any ammunition?"

Officer: "Never mind how we found it out. We know you have some hidden here."

Mrs. Padget: "Hah! We are going to be much obliged to you if you find any. The doctor was, only yesterday, wishin' he had some. Wanted to kill some squirrels. Will you give us a little if you find some?"

Officer: "Go in that room and search it. (Turns to Mrs. Padget.) "Why, most assuredly." (Sarcastically.)

Mrs. Padget: (She bows.) "But you don't need to tear down the place to find it."

(The soldiers and officer pass into bedroom. Mrs. Compton rises to her feet as they approach and meets them at the door.)

Mrs. Compton: "What do you want? You are soldiers in uniform, we are helpless women and defenseless."

Officer: (Politely but rather sarcastically.) "We merely wish to make a search of your house, madam, for amunition." (Mrs. Padget approaches door and eyes them intently, but turns away. The soldiers go about searching, throwing things about promiscuously. They act very solemn as they proceed, while Mrs. Compton, who has plucked up a little

courage, scolds and upbraids them. They merely grin at one another and go on about their work. They throw the bedclothes on the floor and tear things up generally. The officer turns to the bureau and commences to search it. Mrs. Compton goes to him and pleads with him not to disturb her things.)

Mrs. Compton: "Please do not disturb my things. Why do you act this way? You know there is no ammunition here, or else I would give it to you rather than have the house torn up this way. (Goes to officer who has commenced his search of bureau.) Please, sir, leave those things alone. There is nothing there that can be of the least interest to you." (The officer smiles and proceeds with his search. He comes upon a regalia, the insignia of a high priest of the Chapter of a Masonic lodge.)

Officer: (Holding up regalia.) "Does this belong to a member of your family?"

Mrs. Compton: "It belongs to my husband. Please put it back."

Officer: (Folds the regalia slowly, thoughtfully, and gives it a little pat.) "Madam, I ask your pardon. I would not harm a hair of your head, for the world. (Turns to soldiers.) ATTENTION. (Soldiers with astonishment come to attention.) Place all the things in this room as you found them. Corporal, place a man at each corner of this house, and shoot anyone trying to enter. ATTENTION! March!" (They pass out through the kitchen. As the officer leaves the room behind soldiers, he stops at door, turns and soldierly salutes Mrs. Compton. Exits. The bayonets can be seen through the window as the soldiers pass to and fro. All the time this scene has been transpiring Mrs. Padget goes about her work unexcitedly, occasionally looking with some little interest at the soldiers as they search the house. Her expression is not friendly, but when they march out, she looks at the officer with a friendly expression. A bugle sounds "Fall in." Mrs. Compton runs to kitchen window.)

Mrs. Compton: (From window.) "They are going. Thank heaven. That officer had more manhood than some I have met. I hope his experience here may cause him to think before invading another home. What will become of us if this war lasts much longer?"

Mrs. Padget: "We will all be killed, I reckon, and then I guess they will have to quit. In the South they most always left smoking ruins to show where they had called. Only chimbleys was lef' standing. You have just commenced to understand whut we all had to suffer. I hope to the Almighty you won't have to learn it in the same way."

(Mrs. Compton looks upwards, shakes her head, slowly goes into bedroom, closing door. The ruddy light coming through window has gradually faded and the room becomes dark enough for candles. Mrs. Padget gets two and lighting them places one on table and other on shelf. Enter Mrs. Compton. Just as she enters there is a knock at the kitchen door. She crosses to Mrs. Padget as if for protection.)

Mrs. Padget: "Who are you and whut do you want?"  
(The door opens slowly and Cynthia, grinning, peeps into room.)

Cynthia: "Ain't you all dead yet?"

Mrs. Padget: You onery little devil, where have you been?"

Cynthia: "Down in the cawn fiel'."

Mrs. Compton: "What were you going to do in the corn field?"

Cynthia: "Goin' to stay dar 'til de war wuz over."

Mrs. Compton: (Laughing.) "What were you going to live on?"

Cynthia: "Rosen years an spring watah." (Enters—closing door.)

Mrs. Padget: "Well, now as you dun gone an' located that spring, go on back and get a fresh bucket of water."

Mrs. Compton: "In a few minutes she shall go, Cousin Mollie. Cynthia, go and fix up that room. Clean up some of the dirt those soldiers left."

Mrs. Padget: "All right, but don't be long about it."

Cynthia: (Giggling.) "Yessum, Miss Padget, jus' soon as I git dis room fixed up." (Exits giggling. Mrs. Compton follows her in room and shuts door.)



(As soon as Mrs. Compton and Cynthia leave the kitchen the cellar door is slowly and cautiously raised and the eyes of the spy, Joe Chedister, are seen gleaming in the candle light.)

Joe Chedister: "Woman, have all those soldiers gone?"

Mrs. Padget: "You think so ur you never would a raised that door."

Joe Chedister: "I thought I heard the bugle. Just wanted to be sure. (Comes out of cellar, closing door. His attitude changes; he becomes insolent, brutal and unreasonable. "How soon are you going to get me something to cat?" (Roughly.)

Mrs. Padget: "I will git you a sandwich."

Joe Chedister: "Sandwich, hell; I want a square meal."

Mrs. Padget: "My supper is cooking, been so much happened here ain't had time to do nuthin'."

Joe Chedister: (He goes up to her and pushes her toward the stove.) "Come on and get me something to eat or you will be sorry for it. I am a desperate man."

Mrs. Padget: "Yes you wuz, when them soldiers wuz after you."

Joe Chedister: "Do you think I could fight a whole regiment?"

Mrs. Padget: "You *bet* I don't. A man who will fight a woman won't fight even *one* man, let 'lone a regimint."

Joe Chedister: "Shut up and get busy with my supper. (She places some food on table, but is not at all cowed or frightened. Chedister sits at table and eats but complains and curses everything given him.) This is a fine mess, nothing fit to eat."

Mrs. Padget: "Where are you from?" (Peering at him.)

Joe Chedister: "None of your damn business. Give me some more bread."

Mrs. Padget: (Gets bread. Looks at him closely as she puts bread on table.) "Seems to me I seen you before."

Joe Chedister: "Well, what about it? Why don't you learn how to cook? You cook like one of them ignorant crackers down in the mountains of Georgia. Look at that bread?"

Mrs. Padget: "We make the best bread we kin with the flour we have to make it out of. If you don't like it, don't eat it." (She turns to leave the table and as she does so a sudden thought seems to come to her, she turns toward him quickly, stoops down and looks him in the face. Her whole manner changes. It is the first time she has lost her listless manner, her expression is one of doubt, suspicion, anxiety and finally rage.)

Joe Chedister: "What are you staring at me for? Get away, you old harriden." (He rises to his feet with an alarmed expression; throws table over, everything on its goes crashing to floor.)

Mrs. Padget: (She is not apparently excited, but has an expression of murderous hatred.) "I know you now (spoken in a dead level voice). I know you, Joe Chedister." (He takes a step backward before her menacing attitude.) "You coward, you had my husband killed." (As she says this he rushes at her. She does not give way before him. He grabs her by the throat, chokes her and strikes her in the face time and again. She falls to the floor, he catches her by the hair, pulls her up and strikes her down again. She screams but fights back viciously. She is pushed down on her knees; she rises and by the very violence of her attack almost knocks him down. He regains his feet, strikes her and she is sent reeling to fall in left lower. Slowly she gets up, sees the secret door; rushes to it, tears it open and with a cry like a wild animal, seizes gun, points it at him and pulls off both barrels. He falls as if struck down by some heavy weight. She catches the gun by the barrel and stands crouching, looking at him with the expression of a tigress, ready to hit him with the gun should he again start toward her. But he lays quite still.)

(Enter Dr. Compton.)

Dr. Compton: (Excited.) "I heard a shot. What does it mean—who did it?"

Mrs. Padget: (Calmly points to body on floor.) "I did it."

Dr. Compton: (Kneels beside body, makes hasty examination.) "God, how he bleeds!" (After pause, rises to feet.) "His whole throat is blown away—he is quite dead."

(Enter Mrs. Compton and Cynthia, showing fear. They stand speechless. The doctor goes to them and they all look at Mrs. Padget with an expression of awe.)

Mrs. Padget: (Looking at blood on floor.) "Now I got to scrub this floor again." (Looking at Cynthia, who stands wild-eyed and speechless.) "Cynthy, you never got that bucket of water."

SLOW CURTAIN.









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